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ABSTRACT

For 3 decades, colleges and universities have consistently increased tuition faster than the rate of inflation. Higher education leaders and public officials have been codependent agents in a process that has transformed practices without redefining policy. It has become increasingly clear that educational performance in the public interest and institutional performance are not identical. In seeking expanded sources of revenue for new opportunities, universities and colleges have helped shift a greater share of the cost of higher education to students and their families, effectively raising the barriers of affordability for many. Those who have public responsibility, usually lack an agree-on agenda, and pursue a variety of maintenance agendas that accord the greatest funding to institutions and students who are the most advantaged. Changing institutional behavior falls within the realm of possibility if a state can establish one or two strong priorities that serve to focus the resources and energies of higher education institutions and other stakeholders. Collaboration between higher education leaders and public officials is key to advancing a state's public purposes. (SLD)

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# Of Precept, Policy, and Practice

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P—O—L—I—C—Y

# PERSPECTIVES

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## Of Precept, Policy, and Practice

It is a precept as old as parenting itself: Do as I say, not as I do. It follows us into adulthood, into professional and public life—a sustaining habit of favoring proclamation over action that inevitably leads to a disassociation of policy and practice.

For more than three decades, public policy toward American higher education has derived from principles that are broadly understood, if unevenly applied: that a collegiate education ought to be available to anyone who seeks to learn, regardless of educational background, ethnicity, or economic circumstance; that higher education should be affordable, personally rewarding, and conducive to a broader social contract linking education to the public weal. To this catalog there have been added other convictions, notably that colleges and universities ought to be publicly accountable for the quality of the educations they provide as well as the prices they charge.

Those goals notwithstanding, for three decades colleges and universities have consistently increased tuition faster than the rate of inflation; they have successfully avoided the kind of public accountability that has become the hallmark of primary through secondary education; and, with the exception of community colleges, they have almost uniformly sought the competitive advantages more selective admissions bring. American higher education has achieved its greatest success in the conferring of personal rewards—to the extent that a college education has become the principal if not the sole means of personal economic advancement.

Higher education leaders and public officials have been co-dependent agents in a process that has transformed practices without redefining policy. Both have essentially looked the other way as states accorded smaller shares of their total budgets to higher education and institutions increased tuition and other costs faster than inflation. Even though state appropriations to public institutions as a whole increased by 13 percent per student in constant dollars between 1980 and 1998, state funding has declined as a proportion of the budget of public colleges and universities. In seeking expanded sources of revenue to pursue new opportunities, universities and colleges have helped shift a greater share of the cost of higher education to students and their families, effectively raising the barriers of affordability for many. It is the market that increasingly supplies the funds by which institutions both sustain current operations and invest in new ventures—a lesson whose importance has not been lost on either institutions or their student-consumers.

**Higher education leaders and public officials have been co-dependent agents in a process that has transformed practices without redefining policy.**

In this process. What has become increasingly clear is that educational performance in the public interest and institutional performance are not one in the same. One event that has helped catch that differemces



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in sharp relief was the publication of and subsequent response to *Measuring Up 2000: The State-by-State Report Card for Higher Education*. The *Report Card*, published by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, represents a first attempt to gauge how well each state's educational system has collectively served the public interest in five broad categories: preparation, affordability, participation, completion, and the benefits higher education confers to a state and its citizens. The *Report Card* helped underscore the differences that exist between statewide performance on matters of broad public interest on the one hand, and conventional measures of institutional performance on the other. In the first edition of the *Report Card*, only five states received an "A" for affordability, only seven received an "A" for participation, and just one state, Illinois, received an "A" in both categories. The nation's overall grade in 2000 was a "C" for affordability and a "C" for participation. In the *Report Card's* 2002 edition, the grades of most states on these measures remained decidedly average.

**In seeking expanded sources of revenue to pursue new opportunities, universities and colleges have helped shift a greater share of the cost of higher education to students and their families, effectively raising the barriers of affordability for many.**

While the *Report Card* gauges the performance of states in terms of how well the public is served, colleges and universities—and by extension the men and women who manage and lead them—are being evaluated by measures of a different devising. For these purposes, what is important is an institution's visibility and prestige and its capacity to compete for students, for faculty, for research dollars, and even for athletes. For presidents in particular, what matters most is institution building—and if that has come to mean succeeding in an increasingly competitive market, so be it!

What has been occurring over the past 30 years is an incremental but steady privatization of higher education. The pipeline that would fund public purposes does not overflow with dollars. For institutions, the most promising source of new dollars is the private sector, and those funds most often target the achievement of institutional purposes and competitive advantage. The experiences of states and institutions through this period have helped delineate more clearly what markets can and cannot achieve—as well as the kinds of roles public policy must resume or develop as markets come to represent the most promising resource for institutions seeking to achieve new goals. Experience has taught that institutions are most likely to pursue a public agenda when the focus is on the creation of assets, yielding the possibility of more faculty in particular areas, the development of new programs, or the expansion of programs currently in place. The challenge confronting public policy in a time of budget contraction is determining how to engage the interests of institutions in refocusing the use of assets they currently have.

A starting point for all such discussions is to pose a fundamental set of questions concerning the relationship of higher education institutions to their state: To the extent a state pays to support a system of universities and colleges, what should that state expect in return? What obligations do a state's colleges and universities, both public and private, assume in return for the financial support they receive? Can or should policymakers expect the institutions supported by public funds to fulfill publicly enumerated goals and purposes? And, not least, can public officials be held accountable for how well their state's institutions of higher education serve the public interest?

Our answers to these questions derive from a Roundtable on Leadership and Public Purposes, convened jointly by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Knight Collaborative in June 2002. Our premise was that the chemistry of any successful initiative to achieve better alignment between policy and practice would involve both presidents of institutions and policymakers as primary agents of change. Accordingly, our roundtable included those with extensive policy experience in a variety of state environments, as well as current and former presidents of a range of institutions both public and private.

## Practice Without Policy

Anyone seasoned in the workings of public policy knows that the alignment of a state's public purposes



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with the behavior of institutions is often tangential. One phenomenon that helped impart the appearance of unified purpose was the substantial growth in higher education enrollments that occurred from the 1950s through the 1970s. In the course of those decades, the number of four-year public institutions increased from 344 to 426; in the same period, the number of public two-year institutions increased from 297 to 634. It was a period in which public purposes and institutional purposes fell naturally into accord. Providing students with access to a quality higher education was the central theme of public policy, and expanded capacity was the means of achieving it. Institution building benefited the interests of students and of higher education, while also achieving a central component of a state's public policy objectives.

Even today, the challenge of institution building confronts several states in which the demand for higher education exceeds current capacity. But as most state systems of higher education have come to attain sufficient capacity, the alignment of public and institutional purposes has become less clear. Growth makes it possible to entertain several related goals in the assurance that the competition among them is small to non-existent. In times of budget contraction, however, the differences between an institutional and a public agenda stand out. The relationship of institutional behavior to a state's public agenda is now less obvious as the challenge facing most public officials has shifted from capacity building to capacity utilization.

With very few exceptions, this shift has evolved without sustained public discussion of what should constitute the public interest in higher education following the era of capacity building. In the absence of such discussions, determining both the level and distribution of a state's funding for its universities and colleges becomes a matter of inertia as interpreted through the prism of individual politics and personalities. No less than the colleges and universities they monitor, public agencies responsible for higher education policy have themselves become institutions—with all the ingrained customs and behaviors the term implies. As with institutions of every stripe, once the machinery of governance is set in motion, it becomes increasingly difficult to alter course. What happened last year becomes the basis for deciding what will happen this year and the next—a self-repeating cycle that only occasionally takes note of changed circumstances or new leadership.

The result is a condition once described in these pages as "getting policy without making policy"—an environment in which a state's higher education policy is the net result of budget negotiations, without reference to any larger framework describing educational ends. To proceed in the absence of stated policy is often a conscious, if unspoken, policy choice: taking this stance helps prevent latent differences from coming to the surface in public debate. In the absence of deliberate policy, it is discretionary choice and individual pursuit of opportunity—often described as the workings of markets—that become increasingly powerful forces determining the shape and direction of a state's higher education institutions. One expression of this phenomenon is the declining power of many state systems of higher education to oversee or contain the growth and ambitions of individual institutions within a state. A particularly telling example can be seen in the dismantling of the Florida Board of Regents, leaving individual institutions in that state with greater autonomy to compete with one another in a Darwinian battle to build research programs and inch forward on traditional scales of prestige.

**The problem is that those with public responsibility, for the most part, lack an agreed-upon agenda, pursuing instead a variety of maintenance agendas that are themselves products of habit and history, and that accord the greatest funding to institutions and students who are most advantaged.**

It is not that states have forgotten about their higher education institutions. The appropriations for salaries, operations, capital construction, and equipment continue to account for substantial shares of every state's budget. The problem is that those with public responsibility, for the most part, lack an agreed-upon agenda, pursuing instead a variety of maintenance agendas that are themselves products of habit and history, and that accord the greatest funding to institutions and students who are most advantaged.

At the same time, and perhaps ironically, public officials over the last decade have intensified their complaints about higher education's performance in general and the failings of colleges and universities in

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particular. Too much attention is paid to research—and too much research is esoteric. Teaching and learning are given short shrift. At best, faculty are indifferent to the wants and needs of students who pursue a college education principally as preparation for work. Too often institutions are consumed by their quest for the icons of prestige. Too much time is spent in pursuit of institutional agendas. And yet, no matter how pointed their concerns about the quality of education that undergraduates receive in research universities, most states allot funding to such institutions in much greater degree than to those whose mission and hence central focus is the teaching of undergraduates.

The same disparity can be seen in the call for stronger partnerships between publicly supported colleges and universities on the one hand, and primary and secondary schools on the other. Despite the rhetorical support of programs designed to improve college preparation, participation, and completion, there are embarrassingly few instances when a state actually aligns its resources to effect the building of such partnerships. Those institutions that work to advance the public interest experience neither better nor worse rewards from a state than competing institutions that have not given priority to public purpose.

Inevitably, albeit quietly, most leaders within higher education have come to doubt the conviction underlying those protestations of public purpose. An institutional leader does not need rocket science to parse which priorities ought to matter most, given the disparity between the funding states allot to their research universities, comprehensive institutions, and community colleges. On most campuses—and certainly in the offices of the president and those responsible for governmental relations—it is well-understood that the state allots upwards of 95 percent of the public monies it annually invests in higher education to maintain that which it has already built.

The question that is almost never asked, by either presidents or policymakers, is: Would a major recasting of such funding patterns yield a set of institutions more responsive to public purposes? In lieu of addressing that inquiry, the decisions public officials make are largely confined to the mechanics of reallocation, weighing the state's appropriation to higher education against an array of competing claims for state funds. The fundamental question—To what end?—is simply not on the table.

## Presidential Agendas

Nor do broad discussions of higher education's public purposes appear on many presidential agendas. *Measuring Up* met a deafening silence on college campuses everywhere. Leaders of private institutions largely interpreted the *Report Card's* grades as reflecting on the quality of their state's *public* system of higher education. And the presidents of public institutions for the most part avoided genuine engagement with the subject: the few passions that were evoked centered on the fact that a state's private institutions might have skewed the affordability measure. On no campus, as far as we know, was there a sustained discussion of the *Report Card* or its implications—no first steps toward a recasting of institutional practices to better pursue public purposes. This fact could only remind most presidents of what they already knew: that they are paid to build their institution and then protect its autonomy against all comers. There is simply no gain—and much to lose—in staking one's presidency on the achievement of state policy goals.

**For the presidents of both public and private institutions, the terms of office and measures of performance stem directly from the question: Where will the growth of institutional resources come from?**

In some ways, the pressures confronting a college or university president today are not that different from those which existed 20 or 30 years ago. Broadening the revenue base, strengthening the quality and reputation of the institution, and enrolling the best possible student body have always been part of a president's to-do list. What has changed is the all-pervasive importance of fundraising in a president's job description—not just in the traditional form of donations from friends and alumni, but increasingly through the brokering of deals that shape an institution's ability to compete in a full range of teaching, research, and service markets. More often than not, fundraising is the primary charge and performance criterion handed down from an institution's governing board. For the presidents of both public and private institutions, the terms of office and measures of performance stem directly from the question: From where will the growth of institutional resources come?



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It is in this sense that today's president is paid principally to be an enterprise builder. As most states came to achieve sufficient capacity in higher education, they shifted the focus of public policy to other priorities—fighting crime, improving public primary and secondary education, and funding the Medicare and Medicaid mandates established by the federal government. Institutions were increasingly left to their own devices, expected to pursue their own agendas while learning to master the discipline of the market. Not surprisingly, the resulting institutional agendas seldom corresponded to the public policy goals of enhancing students' preparation for higher education, improving the rate of participation, making higher education affordable to all students, or ensuring that a college education, in addition to enhancing the economic quality of their students' lives, strengthened the fabric of society. The only direct, though still largely accidental, link between a state's public purposes and institutional priorities is the importance each assigns to increasing graduation rates. For most institutions, however, the benefits of increased retention are seen as largely financial and reputational. Colleges and universities with high graduation rates can both charge higher prices and practice more selective admissions.

What dominates most institutional, and hence presidential, agendas today is the need to advance the institution's standing in higher education's traditional pecking order. To a president it means such things as building endowment, increasing faculty salaries, and better branding the institution's products. For many regional comprehensive universities, it means building and expanding graduate programs and winning more external research dollars in order to advance the institution another notch toward research university status. With regard to students, the president's performance objective is often to lead a process of making the institution more selective. Colleges and universities have become remarkably adept at saying no to more students and calling it success.

While a president may give a personal stamp to an institution's strategies and tactics, much of the chief executive's role consists of generating funds to support a long-standing agenda, one with roots so deep in the institution as to seem immutable. The sheer inertia of institutional aspiration often makes presidents reluctant to embark on a course of action that departs substantially from the direction an institution has already indicated it wishes to pursue.

This pressure also helps explain the relative scarcity of those who use their presidencies as bully pulpits to help define public purpose. A set of focus groups recently conducted by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI) suggests that even those presidents who do speak out on behalf of larger causes understand they are not likely to be taken seriously when they do so. Most audiences appear to think that presidents champion public causes only to burnish their own or their institution's public persona. Like their counterparts in the business world, presidents are expected to become CEOs, applying their managerial and executive skills to pursue institutional goals and agendas, while making sure that the enterprises they lead are financially successful and expansive.

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## Getting There First

Still, on occasion, college and university presidents can become active agents in the formulation of public policies, particularly when they and their institutions have focused on the details of governmental appropriation. By the kinds of data they collect and analyze, institutions often come to see emerging trends that have implications for how a state funds its universities and colleges. Institutions that enroll greater numbers of returning adult students and deliver more education through electronic means, for example, have been the first to understand that state funding formulas based on full-time enrollments—or even contact hours in the classroom—work against the ways in which many students actually attain their college degrees. In one example, data that community colleges gathered on the number of students completing their high school education through General Education Development (GED) tests helped refocus state priorities to encourage more students to earn



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their high school degrees—and then proceed to pursue further study, most likely at a community college. It is an example of a group of organized presidents getting there first, helping draw the attention of public officials to matters that entail a rethinking of the mechanisms and to some extent the purposes of public appropriations for higher education.

Another example of the same phenomenon can be seen in a series of initiatives first undertaken by presidents some 20 years ago, some of which began to attain visible momentum over the past decade. While the particular focus of these activities varied, the impetus for each was a common presidential conviction in the need to engage undergraduates more fully in developing the values of citizenship and service to society. Small but significant numbers of presidents came to observe that the nation as a whole had begun to neglect one of its great strengths: the willingness of its citizens to help one another. Collectively these initiatives, spearheaded by college and university presidents, served as a reminder that fostering the values of citizenship and service is an important part of the education their institutions provide. The point was—and is—that civic engagement means advancing precept into practice, helping students translate personal values into actions that serve societal needs in addition to benefiting themselves.

As more universities and colleges became involved in programs of this sort, it became evident that two things would need to occur if such efforts were to achieve full potential. First, a given program would need to link directly to the academic core of the institution; and, second, a program would need to establish direct ties to the public policy agenda of the state.

Experience has also shown that, in order to realize the second of these conditions, institutions and state policymakers must work together to create an infrastructure that will advance a given set of initiatives—not just for institutions but in the workings of public policy. Within any state, that infrastructure must consist of two things: a forum that makes it possible to advance and debate an issue in the realm of public discussion; and a vision and strategy for translating the purposes identified into actions, in state policy as well as institutions.

*Campus Compact* is perhaps the largest and most visible result of earlier presidential initiatives to foster increased commitment to service and civic engagement as educational values. This initiative can best be described as a glass half full. Twenty years after its founding, over 750 colleges and universities throughout the U.S. claim membership to this organization; of these, possibly one-third are significantly engaged—which is to say, they have actively sought to build the necessary links to their academic programs and to their state's policy objectives. Even for these institutions, however, *Campus Compact* does not require a substantial redirection of financial resources or human energies. Most institutions find it comparatively easy to belong and to reap the symbolic benefit of participating without significantly altering much of anything.

The glass is half full, as opposed to half empty, in the sense that *Campus Compact* and other such programs demonstrate that there are presidents who seek to be more than just CEOs and institution builders. These programs offer the hopeful prospect of engagement that could be expanded through the purposeful commitment of institutions in conjunction with state public officials. Collectively, they offer examples of college and university presidents getting there first—becoming the drivers of an agenda that ultimately seeks to engage state public officials in the fulfillment of objectives that are important both to higher education institutions and to the public weal. In principle, however, the more likely first movers are a state's elected officials and policymakers, precisely because they have the power of the purse. They also have the advantage of a relatively broad consensus as to the stated goals of publicly supported higher education. What they say they seek is easily enumerated: broad access, economic development, publicly engaged citizens, skilled workforces, and research that promotes improved standards of living.

The difficulty lies not in the rhetorical support accorded this agenda, but rather in its implementation—in the translation of this specific set of public purposes into the day-to-day activities and behaviors that collectively define institutional goals and directions. What is required is a set of public initiatives that institutions can perceive as being in their own interests to pursue. Part of the challenge, then, is identifying the areas in which the interests of public officials and institutional leaders overlap as a basis for collaborative approaches to achieving broadly shared public purposes. A well-funded, well-formulated state initiative can give presidents the framework and authority


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needed to enlist their own campuses in what must come to be seen as a common cause. The questions then become: How can public officials frame an agenda in a way that makes it sensible for presidents to take up an issue and move it forward? What are the public policy issues on which presidents are best suited to lead? And certainly not least: What incentives and other inducements can public officials create that make it impossible for institution builders not to pay attention?

Finally, a question that can form a central axis in the dynamic between policymakers and institutional leaders is the role that data can play in shaping and advancing an agenda of public purposes. One of the lessons *Measuring Up* teaches is the power of having real data and hence concrete measures of how well the stated goals are in fact being achieved. At the same time, the response to the *Report Card* shows the ease with which data can be devalued or dismissed out of hand if the measures do not correspond with an institution's—or a state's—own sense of where it is going and what it needs to know. States that have taken the *Report Card* seriously have begun to ask different kinds of questions and consider alternative policies and programs. What has not yet happened in any substantial degree is the extension of this process to institutions, whose practices will determine in part how well a state achieves the kinds of purposes the *Report Card* helps to gauge. Comparatively few state officials have created an environment that would lead an institution to ask different questions of itself or its principal constituencies.

## Asking the Questions

A pair of practical examples can help make the point. Among the many areas in which higher education has the capacity to effect significant improvement in the well-being of a state, two are of particular importance: adult literacy, and public primary and secondary education. No state can hope to make significant improvements in its educational, civic, and economic vitality if one-third or more of its adult population lacks basic literacy skills. By the same token, no state can hope to improve its students' preparation for higher education without dramatically improving the quality of education provided in its primary and secondary schools. Both of these challenges represent

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opportunities in which higher education can play a substantial role. If the governor and legislature were to engage a state's higher education institutions in a process of reaching these goals through collaboration with schools, businesses, and other players, institutional leaders would find it in their interests to contribute to these goals, far more than they do in the absence of such initiatives. Changing institutional behavior falls more squarely within the realm of possibility if a state can establish one or two strong priorities that serve to focus the resources and energies of higher education institutions and other stakeholders. The challenge facing state policymakers is the defining of public initiatives that in fact promise real progress in these domains.

Building a better alignment between the challenges of public policy and the agendas of higher education institutions is no simple task, and there can be no generic approach to the process, given the differences in the policy environments of states themselves. The extent of a governor's power, the role and strength of a state's higher education governing or coordinating board, the mix of public and private institutions, the amount of resources directed toward higher education, the demographics of a state and its rate of population growth—all of these factors shape the dynamic between public policy and the workings of a state's colleges and universities. In the face of such variations, specific recommendations are difficult to make. What can be compelling for any state and any institution, however, is to ask the following series of questions, the answers to which can provide a telling portrait of how effectively the state's policy environment aligns with the objectives of its higher education institutions. They are tough questions that may give pause to public officials and campus presidents alike:



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### For Public Officials

- How explicitly has the state identified and communicated the purposes it wishes to achieve through its higher education institutions?
- How well does the funding the state provides its higher education institutions align with the public purposes the state seeks to achieve through its system of universities and colleges? What incentives and methods of engagement has the state created to make the fulfillment of public purposes in the interests of institutions themselves?
- What systematic steps is the state taking to determine how well its investment in higher education actually serves the public purposes it has identified? What kinds of measures does the state apply to determine how effective its investment is, in terms of advancing the common weal? Are the measures traced annually, are trends reviewed, and are discussions held about what is and is not working?
- Where are the firecrackers—in the form of programs and initiatives—that can break loose the pattern of institution building that bears little relation to a state's public purposes?

### For Institutional Leaders

- Through what programs and initiatives does the institution actively serve the public interests of a state and its citizens?
- To what extent are the institution's initiatives on behalf of the public agenda understood and affirmed throughout the institution?
- Does the fulfillment of the purposes identified engage a broad cross-section of the faculty, staff, and administration, or is it relegated to a small number of units and individuals? Does the initiative's symbolic value exceed the institution's actual investment of time and financial resources to fulfill an objective?
- To what extent have the institution's efforts to advance the public well-being occasioned changes in the priorities of the institution's academic core?
- What steps has the institution taken to build the forum for debate and the partnerships that give an issue traction in the arenas of public policy? To what extent has the institution succeeded in getting there first—providing the leadership and coalition building required to advance an issue in the public agenda?
- To what extent has the institution collected data to gauge its performance in advancing a state's public purposes? What kinds of data has it collected, and how have those data helped change priorities and behavior in the institution?

## The Power of Collaboration

A common way of deflecting any initiative that involves changing behavior is to say that the time is not right. In times of economic scarcity, many are heard to observe that reform requires dollars that neither states nor institutions have. In times of plenty, the common wisdom holds that institutions have no incentive to change, and that a good recession is the prerequisite to any serious reform.

Public policy is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for changing the behavior of institutions. As institution builders, university and college presidents naturally respond to the wants and needs, both implicit and explicit, of the institutions they lead. Public policy and the pressures of public expectation make up part of that environment, but, as it turns out, they are only occasional generators of presidential priorities. No public policy initiative has ever succeeded by simply appealing to a president's instincts to do the right thing.

**It is collaboration between higher education leaders and public officials that holds the most important key to success in advancing a state's public purposes.**

It is collaboration between higher education leaders and public officials that holds the most important key to success in advancing a state's public purposes. The most practical way of beginning is to identify those areas where the interests of public officials and presidents overlap, and then to ask: What changes in incentives, what approaches to collaborative engagement, what funding mechanisms, what measures of performance would make it impossible for institutions not to engage in a state's public agenda?


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We conceive a model approach as being one that brings a broad range of players to the table to define a state's public policy objectives and the roles that its universities and colleges can play in achieving them. For any given state, the process would include the governor, key legislators, the head of the state's governing or coordinating board, and presidents of as many colleges and universities as it is possible to convene at a given time, in addition to business and civic leaders. More than simply appealing to the presidents' better instincts, a model approach would involve understanding just where the state stands in terms of key measures of public performance; setting statewide goals for improvement; and creating action plans to achieve those goals—programs that make it possible for institutions to play explicit roles that correspond to their own areas of strength in helping achieve a state's civic and economic polity.

Some states have actively sought to build the partnerships necessary to achieve broader policy goals that serve the public interest. Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and South Dakota have each convened statewide forums that engage public officials as well as institutional leaders. These forums have helped define a common vision to address the educational challenges each state faces. In North Dakota, that process has yielded a broadly shared conviction that a key role of the state's higher education system is to promote the diversification and continued vitality of the state's economy. South Dakota has applied the technique of a periodic statewide roundtable as effectively as any setting in the nation for the purpose of identifying and gauging continued progress in meeting the state's educational objectives. Oklahoma has convened discussions that center on its *Report Card* scores in framing the roles of higher education, K-12 schools, business leaders, and public officials in improving the state's overall educational performance.

**The challenge in any setting is to proceed beyond agreements in principle—to forge the working partnerships and action strategies that allow a state to make headway on these issues.**

Convening the dialogues is an important step in the larger process of forming partnerships that allow a state to move forward in advancing public purposes in conjunction with its colleges and universities. The lesson of many roundtables, however, is that good talk in itself does not complete the tasks at hand. The challenge in any setting is to proceed beyond agreements in principle—to forge the working partnerships and action strategies that allow a state to make headway on these issues.

## Two Last Subsuming Questions

Perhaps the toughest questions are those which public officials and campus presidents need to ask of themselves. For nearly 30 years now, most states have tended to solve short-term budget problems by curtailing their rates of investment in higher education and then allowing institutions to augment their revenues by increasing tuition and fees. The result is that universities and colleges have become market enterprises increasingly dependent on their own ability to compete for student enrollments, research grants, and service contracts to fulfill their own agendas. What public officials need to recognize is that markets reward individuals and enterprises and only very indirectly public purposes. The most difficult question officials must ask themselves is: If a state is not prepared to allocate the resources it does invest more directly toward the achievement of public purposes, can it realistically expect higher education institutions to include such goals among their own priorities?

For presidents, the fundamental question to be asked requires less of a preamble. What every president must consider in the candor of the mirror each morning is: Do I really want to be just a CEO? Are the challenges and rewards of leadership wholly confined to managing the enterprise—building its revenues, improving its branding, burnishing its image? What is the possibility that there are sufficient allies within the institution—among faculty, students, staff, and governing board—who want and expect the institution to be more, to serve truly in the public interest? What would it take to make me a first mover?

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## A Case in Progress . . .
## Sharpening Vision and Purpose in a Multi-Campus University

Successful strategy in any organization entails the willingness of different parts to work together in achieving common goals. Higher education struggles with the challenge of building shared commitment to institutional purposes—on single campuses, and particularly in large multi-campus universities and systems. Too often multi-campus institutions give rise to a mindset of hierarchy and disassociation, in which a large campus claims superiority over smaller ones, and each pursues separate visions with minimal reference to one another.

A large system works most effectively when each of its campuses is perceived as being a distinctive, high-quality learning environment in its own right, with a particular contribution to make in achieving common institutional purposes. The question then becomes:

- How to empower a shared vision of a major university that includes one large and several smaller campuses ...
- a vision that sees each campus as having distinctive strengths, providing a range of learning venues and opportunities ...
- a vision that accords different roles to each campus, helping the University become more effective in serving the needs of individual students and communities throughout the state.

A group of some 30 members of the University of Connecticut (UConn) have taken on this challenge to help strengthen their own campuses and the University as a whole. UConn is a major land- and sea-grant university comprising a large campus at Storrs and several regional campuses that were once designated as feeders to the main campus. In the past five years, the mission of these regional campuses has been expanded, allowing each to offer baccalaureate degrees in some fields. In a time of changing economic circumstances as well as changing patterns of educational demand and attainment, how can the University engage the strengths of different campuses to greatest effect in serving the needs of the state and its citizens?

### Moving Forward

An important step in addressing these questions occurred in September 2002, when UConn convened a workshop/retreat with administrative and faculty leaders of its regional campuses. This event provided opportunities for the regional campuses to reflect—both collectively and individually—on the particular qualities and values each contributes to the University and to the regions UConn collectively serves.

Leaders from each campus have since continued to work with their retreat teams and presented summaries of core values and strategies developed in the workshops to their respective campus communities. The next major challenge is to build the on-campus groups that can engage their colleagues in the process of refining and implementing particular campus strategies. In the meantime, periodic meetings and calls among leaders of the different regional campuses and the retreat's facilitators help to spur continued momentum and exchange of ideas.

Reflecting on the progress made thus far, Fred Maryanski, Vice Chancellor for Academic Administration at UConn, observes, "I believe we've moved forward in defining our communications strategies and fine-tuning our visions of the University's regional campuses."

In September 2002 the regional campuses of the University of Connecticut engaged in a workshop/retreat facilitated by the Knight Collaborative, with expertise in the fields of academic and curriculum issues, strategic planning, marketing, and communication.

The UConn regional campus initiative is being overseen by Fred Maryanski, Vice Chancellor for Academic Administration at the University of Connecticut: Fred.Maryanski@uconn.edu

A description of Knight Collaborative Strategic Workshops can be found at:
www.irhe.upenn.edu/knight/workshops.pdf

Contact Rick Morgan: morgan6@irhe.upenn.edu

Certainly it is too early to treat UConn's progress as a completed task, but in the course of its work, the University is addressing some of the most important challenges facing higher education. The potential is here for a future *Exemplars*. Stay tuned.


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